II

THE RANGE OF ACTION

WE have to make of the word environment a very broad term. It must include a man's inheritance, his physical constitution, his education, the social and the natural forces that impinge upon him, and also that group of qualities, however derived, that constitute his proper self—character, tastes, and spirit. There are forces in the environment which may destroy a man or establish him, and, in either case, it is fair to describe the life of every human being as a struggle. Sometimes no doubt the struggle is easy, sometimes evaded, but it is always present. To be defeated in battle because of incompetency, cowardice, or inertness is nevertheless to participate in a battle.

Shakespeare believed, and normally you and I believe, at least in practice, that man has some chance to shape his environment and to adapt himself to it. And indeed there is some reason for this belief to be derived from what we know of man's life on earth. May I use theological words to express this belief? Creation and redemption are concomitant powers of God from the beginning. Not only does God shape and create, but He also heals both in the physical and the spiritual realm. In the physical world we see everywhere the process of natural repair. Wounds heal, the scars of battle are removed from the land by rain and vegetation, the flowers grow on the graves of the dead. In the realm of the spirit we call this redemptive power the grace or the mercy of God. Time does raze out a rooted

sorrow from the mind, sin is forgiven, and man redeemed. Over against creation and redemption are inanition and destruction. Within this area of combat man seems to himself to be an agent and, in some sense, an original force. He believes, I think wisely, that he can come to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Man is thought of as a pawn, an agent, or an original force, and perhaps he is all of these things. In any case, from this mid-region between creation and redemption on the one side, and vacuous idleness and destruction on the other, arises man's claim to be the possessor of free will. We must conclude, pragmatically at least, that man can initiate action or refuse to act.

We can never appreciate the slowness of God's method. It seems geologically and even historically to be an unending succession of trial and error and to occupy eons of time. Time, so scarce and so precious to man, seems the cheapest thing to God. This earth was once without life, hot, seismical, elemental—a chaos indeed. When life appeared it was dull, slow, and simple, and, when it grew to power, it presented what looked like a bad dream of malevolence. Great creatures, stupid appetites, stalked the earth and devoured one another, and this period lasted a very long time. One of these creatures, weaker than most of the lords of the earth, learned to walk on his hind legs and so developed hands, and the hands helped to develop a brain. The brain enabled him to use a new force, intelligence, in order to save himself and get his way. Intelligence developed into art and, strangely enough, into morals. The tenderest love and the justest altruism arose slowly and ultimately became the great forces of the earth. Who then is so hardy as to set an arbitrary limit to God's plan for men on earth? God will take his time, but, in spite of wars and wickedness, the latent forces, the great forces, may triumph in the end.

Interest, which is ultimately self-interest, arises from witnessing a struggle or contest such as that in which we are or might be or must be engaged, and drama is the great representative art in time and space which best serves to bring before us man's various struggles with his environment. If there is no struggle, there is no dramatic interest. This is particularly true of tragedy which, as conceived of by Aristotle, is quite definitely directed toward the purging of our emotions through pity and fear; pity for human misfortune, and fear that we too may be unfortunate.

From this point of view there is no tragedy in the actions of God. Humanly conceived, God the Father may suffer because of the recalcitrance of his offspring or because of the inroads of the enemy. You may recall that the character God remarks in *Green Pastures,* "It's a lot of trouble being God." But this is not the God of all power and illimitable patience who caused to evolve, and is causing to evolve, by slow process the civilized world and the race of man. That God is sure to have his way in his good time. It is clear, however, there is no drama in complete command, perfect competence, perfect knowledge. Hence it comes about that *The Tempest* has never been a dramatic success and is best enacted as a theatrical spectacle. Prospero has everything his own way and is therefore interesting only as a poet and philosopher. Perhaps Prospero had bored his creator a little bit, for Prospero determines to forsake magic and return to the land of men where there is no perfection and nobody has his own way.

> But this rough magic
> I here abjure, ...
> I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than ever did plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.
> (V, i, 50-57)

The surrender of the staff of power and the book of knowledge was a big price to pay for the privilege of living just the blundering life of a mortal upon earth.

There is no drama also in mere non-participation, whether it arises from avoidance of the conflict or from definite refusal to participate. The first sort is denounced by Milton, who says in *Areopagitica:* "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat." The second is embodied in the ancient and absolute story of Timon of Athens, who, having been deceived and cheated by all his fellowmen, becomes a complete and incurable misanthrope. He denounces the sycophants who have abused his generosity, retires to the seashore, and dies after having written an epitaph in which he curses mankind. Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* is a play which contains some of the best of Shakespeare's writing but was apparently left by its author incomplete. Shakespeare enjoyed doing parts of the play, such as the rogue-like crookedness of his flatterers and Timon's curses directed against mankind, but seems to have sickened of the dramatically unworkable subject. The main theme, because there is no struggle, is impossible of tragic treatment. Timon, who does nothing, is at the opposite pole from Prospero, who does everything. The range of action must somehow lie between Prospero and Timon.

It is somewhere recorded that Dr. Johnson was much touched on one occasion by the words of a beggar woman who described herself to him as "an old struggler." He, remembering the course of his life, applied the words to himself. Bunyan walked through "the Wilderness of this World" and saw in his dream "a man clothed in rags,

standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back." That man "brake out with a lamentable cry; saying, What shall I do?" Always man's life is set in the midst of struggle, and no figure of speech, about life as of a battle, a pilgrimage, a servant in the house, or a prodigal son, ever fails to embody the concept of struggle.

In Shakespeare the typical case is Hamlet. It is the failure to recognize this fact that has caused the play to be so widely misunderstood in spite of the fact that it is the easiest of Shakespeare's tragedies to understand, and the one most widely applicable to normal life. Hamlet has been explained away by many critics, he has been vulgarly misunderstood, but he continues inescapable, because Hamlet is Everyman. The terms of the problem of living, both as conceived by Shakespeare's age and by ours, are two. The first of these is courage to undertake and to do. All men hesitate to take up arms against a sea of troubles, and all men are prone to hesitation and delay. All the blame bestowed upon Hamlet as a procrastinator rests squarely on the shoulders of men, and they know it. They too, if they are honest with themselves, must pause and say,

> Now, whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event,
> A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward, I do not know
> Why yet I live to say, "This thing's to do."
> (IV, iv, 39–44)

But there is also another principle widely recognized by the Renaissance. Before a man can act effectively he must master his own soul. His hand must be guided by intelligence. His reason must rule, and he must achieve the calmness which comes with self-knowledge and self-control.

He must learn to be indifferent to what Hamlet calls "the event." Shakespeare makes this abundantly clear all through the play of *Hamlet*. The soliloquies show Hamlet's progression toward action and peace of mind. Horatio stands on one side of him as a man who has self-mastery, and Fortinbras on the other as a man to whom action is easy.

This struggle to act and to act wisely, to discharge one's duty with some indifference to the consequences, is man's most typical struggle in the world. Indeed, it is the typical struggle of the race of man against his earthly environment both now and through the eons of time. This is the reason why *Hamlet* is perhaps the most significant literary work ever written by the human hand and also the reason why *Hamlet* inescapably intrudes itself into the minds of the civilized world. Jerome Cardan, the Milanese physician of the sixteenth century, suffered so much from the blows of fortune and the stress of living that he wrote a book *De Consolatione* to give himself courage to do, to suffer, and be calm. There is no doubt in my mind that Shakespeare knew this book and that it aided him in conceiving of his most typical character.

There is no doubt about the genuineness of the troubles that beset Hamlet. His first soliloquy shows him shocked, stupefied, his hand inert:

Ham. O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month—
Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman!
(I, ii, 129–146)

It is not nor it cannot come to good:
But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.
(I, ii, 158–159)

The exhortation of his father's ghost plunges him into a state of bewilderment:

Ham. Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables,—meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark:
(Writing)
So uncle, there you are. Now to my word;
It is 'Adieu, adieu! remember me.'
I have sworn 't.
(I, v, 97–112)

In the most famous of the soliloquies it is plain that Hamlet has progressed to a state of balance between action and inaction so typical that the world has learned it by heart:

Ham. To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them.
(III, i, 56–60)

In the most seriously debated soliloquy of the plot it is plain that Hamlet has studied his part so well that we think him over-scrupulous. The King is at prayer and Hamlet looks at him:

Ham. Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do 't.
(III, iii, 72–73)

Then he decides against immediate action, not through cowardice, but through thinking too precisely on the event. He still lacks that indifference to consequences which he must achieve before he becomes the perfect hero:

Ham. And so he goes to heaven;
And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd:
A villain kills my father: and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread;
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought,
'Tis heavy with him: and am I then revenged,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?
No!
Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent.
(III, iii, 73–88)

It should be borne in mind that Hamlet's failure to act is not due to mere procrastination. It is due to a desire to act too exquisitely, to regulate all the consequences. The standard of revenge required that the avenger should be completely evened with his victim. Cutwolfe in *Jack Wilton* follows exactly the Italian prescription. He has tracked down his victim and has him at the pistol's point. The rule demands that he shall destroy his enemy's soul as well as his body. He accordingly promises to spare his victim's

life if the poor wretch will abjure Christ. When his enemy has cursed God and renounced salvation, Cutwolfe fires his pistol into his victim's mouth, so that there might be no recantation. Hamlet is not to blame for not killing the King. He is trying to do the thing properly, and like other human beings merely makes a mistake, which, like most mistakes, results in a greater one—the killing of Polonius behind the arras:

> Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
> I took thee for thy better.
>
> (III, iv, 31–32)

During the period of inaction brought upon him by his misfortune Hamlet in a very human way keeps his courage up by blaming himself, nowhere more obviously than in the soliloquy he utters after he beholds the march of the troops commanded by Fortinbras:

> *Ham.* How all occasions do inform against me,
> And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
> Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and god-like reason
> To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event,
> A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward, I do not know
> Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do;'
> Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
> To do 't.
>
> (IV, iv, 32–46)

That Hamlet has progressed to a more philosophic state of mind with reference to the value of life appears in his conversation with Horatio in the churchyard, and when we again hear his general voice toward the end of the play it announces his triumph over life and death:

Hor. You will lose this wager, my lord.

Ham. I do not think so; since he went into France, I have been in continued practice; I shall win at the odds. But thou would'st not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.

Hor. Nay, good my lord,—

Ham. It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving, as would perhaps trouble a woman.

Hor. If your mind dislike any thing, obey it: I will forestal their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

Ham. Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all: since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

(V, ii, 219–235)

Because *Hamlet* exemplifies so well what I have called the range of action and because my interpretation is not the customary one, I should like to review what I have been saying from a slightly different point of view. I am anxious to be understood. *Hamlet* may be taken as the central and possibly the most significant of Shakespeare's contributions to the Elizabethan drama. He was to make other contributions later, but *Hamlet* is an essential achievement of Shakespeare as a dramatist.

There is reason for thinking that he wrote the play in its full form about the year 1601. The first quarto version, a most imperfect copy certainly prepared in some irregular and hasty way for acting on the stage, has been partly revamped from the authorized copy. It has parts derived verbatim from the true text. The first quarto was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1602, so that the full version must have been in existence at that time. There is a reference to *Hamlet* in Gabriel Harvey's *Marginalia* which almost certainly is to be dated between 1598 and 1601, so that Hamlet may be taken as a starting point for the new century.

Hamlet shows an awareness on Shakespeare's part of the new way of thinking. The ethical contest in the play is not immediately between passion and reason, but between passion and self-control or stoical indifference to the blows of fortune. Shakespeare in *Hamlet* sees man's situation in life in the broadest possible way, but the remedy for man's ills which he proposes and works out triumphantly is quite definitely stated in stoical terms.

The problem confronting Hamlet may be thus stated: man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward; how shall man triumph over this universal enemy? His only salvation lies in the control of his mind, since the frame of his being is within his own mind. Hamlet suddenly found himself deeply immersed in trouble, and his tendency, like that of all men, was to lose himself in a wilderness of eternal woe. But Hamlet has the clue to the mystery, and it is he who says, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." It follows that to achieve victory Hamlet, like all men, must control his mind. This is a goal of the Renaissance reinforced by stoical teachings.

Misery and solicitude tie man's hands and leave him forever impotent. He must learn to be indifferent to consequences and yet must also act. The terms of life as the Renaissance saw it, and as we see it, are a settled and balanced self-control plus action. The play of *Hamlet* rests upon these two fundamentals of individual life, and, in spite of all attempts to explain it away, *Hamlet* cannot be ignored; it does not allow itself to be forgotten. However much critics may declare they are not as other men, *Hamlet* returns to plague them. To say that Hamlet is worried and hesitant, "lapsed in time and passion," is merely to say that all men are so or may be so. There is even an opinion in inferior and ill-informed minds that Hamlet is a special

sort of defective person, the horrible example of a doubter. Shakespeare means that all men are doubters, that all men let go by the important acting of a dread command, and has, in point of fact, told the story with the utmost clarity. It is only the mistakes and vanities of critics which have made a mystery of it. *Hamlet* is the most universally applicable of Shakespeare's plays, and this circumstance accounts for its popularity among all classes and all ages; it offers a solution of the problem of man alive.

Shakespeare makes clear in many places what kind of man Hamlet is. For example, early in the play he has Hamlet comment most wisely on the Danish courtly habit of drunkenness (I, iv, 13-38), and Hamlet often speaks with princely wisdom. Poor Ophelia's heart-broken comment beginning, "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown" (III, i, 158-169), expresses the current Renaissance ideal of noble young manhood. Shakespeare not only makes clear the kind of man Hamlet is but also in many places the kind of man he would like to be. The most remarkable of these passages is the address to Horatio (III, ii, 59-92) beginning,

> Horatio, thou are e'en as just a man
> As e'er my conversation coped withal.

Hamlet, like Horatio, would fain be

> As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing.

He would also be one with those

> Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled,
> That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please.

If Horatio exemplifies the one side of Hamlet's ideal, Fortinbras as clearly expresses the other. Fortinbras is a man of action, and Hamlet envies him. Few men in the

world have a full measure of these two gifts and all men strive for them, so that in depicting the ideals of his hero Shakespeare has chosen to depict the common state of man.

A third element, the element of uncontrollable destiny, will form for us a final condition which determines human action. When Hamlet has satisfied his conscience, he takes action. When he does so Fate steps in, and Hamlet makes a costly mistake. When he thought he was stabbing the wicked king through the arras, he stabbed Polonius. Who is he that draws the breath of life that does not make mistakes! Hamlet understands what has happened:

> Heaven hath pleas'd it so,
> To punish me with this and this with me.

The consequences of the error, as every one knows, are serious, in a sense fatal, and the dangers in which it involves Hamlet are such that he could meet them only with the resourcefulness of active resolution.

In the soliloquy (IV, iv, 32-66) beginning, "How all occasions do inform against me," we find Hamlet, after seeing the troops of the young Fortinbras on the march, heaping bitter reproaches on himself, but, while he is reproaching himself, he is strengthening his own resolution. To do this was neither strong nor weak as such; it was merely human or, at least, merely a dramatic custom; for it is clear that Shakespeare meant to depict a spiritual victory on Hamlet's part against general human weakness—to show Hamlet in the end ready for action and uncaring for any consequences. In that mood he approaches the duel with Laertes.

This state of mind, we will agree, is, not only for Hamlet, but for all mankind, a consummation devoutly to be wished. With its implicit doctrine of watchfulness, faith, and the will to act, *Hamlet* thus becomes a great treatise

on human conduct, a focal point in the ethics of Shakespeare and his age.

Hamlet, who speaks with the voice of the Renaissance, is right. Action is fundamental, but it must be wise action, neither too much nor too little, neither too soon nor too late. It must, moreover, have back of it noble purpose and the pursuit of the service of God. The cool calculation of Iago and the iron resolution of Richard Crookback are not what is wanted in the world. The executive qualities on which the Renaissance put so much stress may be used in the service of evil. But, granted the will to good, the tantalizing thing about the matter is that little can be arranged beforehand. We must, like soldiers in the field, meet the unseen, the unexpected, and the arduous. Bacon repeats the myth "That Hercules, when he went to unbind Prometheus (by whom human nature is represented), sailed the length of the great ocean in an earthen pot or pitcher." Hamlet is only vaguely aware of the crisis he is to face and yet his mood is the conquering mood of action. He is ready.

When man settles down to the enjoyment of his factitious plans and regards seeming tranquillity or a deed accomplished as the end of the matter, he becomes a prey to heedless inaction and dangerous illusion. It is paradoxically easier to gird ourselves for battle than it is to live wisely in the time of peace.

> Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and god-like reason
> To fust in us unused.

Life is sure to become a crisis for every man and woman who is born with a brave heart and an aspiring mind. Decision sooner or later becomes necessity. It is not, however, so much decision as a readiness and an ability to

decide with which ethics concerns itself, for the issues of the future cannot be known. The only possible resources with which to meet the demands of the future are those which Hamlet finally achieves—watchfulness, courage, humility, and faith. Just as we lie back in our slumbers of indifference and selfish indulgence, our sleep is rudely broken, and crisis is at hand. Moments of crisis and hours of trial confront us, for these things issue from the very nature of human existence. Hamlet's much advertised hesitation is no special fault of his. It is a general fault of humanity.

It is not individuals only to whom this law applies but to peoples also. Nations are now in commotion, and war has seized upon the whole world. Men are marching to battle, the skies are full of warplanes, ships are being sunk at sea, and the rumble of artillery shakes the earth. Something beyond our control, yet which is of the very nature of things, is moving in and through our world. This is no new experience. In various ways and at always unexpected times there are loosed upon the world these horrors of war. The Four Horsemen ride again. God arouses us and compels us to concern ourselves about his truth, which is the very meaning of life.

It was only yesterday that we lived in what we fancied was security. Our selfishness and carelessness were then laying the bases, without our realization, for the disasters we now face. As Henry M. Wriston puts it in *Prepare for Peace* (New York, 1941, p. 2): "It should be observed that war succeeds peace; it does not 'destroy' it. Peace has already broken down before war ensues. Reason has failed, justice has been abandoned, morals have disintegrated before there is a resort to force. War is not the cause of the failure of peace; it is the consequence of that failure."

Perhaps we already begin to perceive an approaching end. If so, it is a beginning for those who are awake and ready. It is here that the analogy between the individual and the state becomes acute. At the height of his philosophic attainment Hamlet declares, "there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow," and at the end of his speech he adds, "the readiness is all." Our national purpose must be noble, as his was, our courage must be strong, and we must be prepared to wait even at the moment of action. We must learn to look beyond ourselves for salvation and lasting victory. We must listen to the cool, clear voice of Christianity, to which in matters of war and peace we have habitually turned a deaf ear. There is no other road to lasting peace among men. We must prepare our minds and hearts for the new day of opportunity. As the matter is put by E. G. Homrighausen in an eloquent sermon ("Life's Perennial Emergency," *The Pulpit,* Vol. XIV, pp. 221-224), to which I acknowledge indebtedness: "if men fail here, or go to sleep in moral inaction, the door will again be shut; and while we go to procure the necessary resources to pursue a just international order, we shall have missed the great opportunity."

It is perhaps not carrying the philosophy of Shakespeare's greatest moral play too far thus to apply it to the field of international life. The principles are the same, and it has been acknowledged since Plato's time that the ethics of men and of nations are one and the same. Few of Shakespeare's plays are so positive in their implications as is *Hamlet. The Tempest* perhaps comes nearest to *Hamlet* in its exaltation of the mood of wisdom directed to beneficent purpose. *Henry V* stresses action and endeavor for a noble end. Wisdom and futility play hide-and-seek in *Troilus and Cressida. Romeo and Juliet, Rich-*

ard III, Othello, King Lear, and *Macbeth* display the curative nature of strife, bring us calm after a great storm, and point us along the road to watchfulness, humility, repentance, courage, and faith.

We shall not attain these virtues, personal or national, all at once. Indeed, we shall probably proceed to our goal through infinite trial and multitudinous error. But let us not despair. God's days are eons, and we must perforce give God his time. Let us not meantime say that the struggle availeth naught, for a wise and courageous struggle with environment, to which we are born, is the essential purpose of our lives. Let us not hold our hands in idleness or busy them in greed and frivolity. Shakespeare never repeats the banal insults of the modern optimist who tells us that life is easy. Shakespeare deals in matters which are probable to human thought and stands in dignified poise, like Bacon. He too says in effect:

> The virtue of prosperity is temperance; the virtue of adversity is fortitude; which in morals is the more heroical virtue. Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New; which carrieth the greater benediction, and the clearer revelation of God's favor. Yet even in the Old Testament, if you listen to David's harp, you shall hear as many hearse-like airs as carols; and the pencil of the Holy Ghost hath laboured more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Salomon. Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes; and adversity is not without comforts and hopes.

What Bacon gives us is a pattern of life drawn from the experience of many men. In its convincing probability it is not unlike the patterns in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and others of his plays. But Shakespeare's patterns are more limited to the actual lives of individuals than those of Bacon. Perhaps the pattern of the life of Hamlet is the most widely applicable of all, since it seems to outline to some degree the struggle against environment of every man alive.

Prospero shows us a pattern of mastery, Henry V of kingship, Ulysses of worldly wisdom, Imogen of wifely loyalty, and so on with others. For the most part Shakespeare shows us moral victories gained at the cost of disaster and death, of victories arising out of the defeat of the wicked.

The field of battle, as we have seen, lies between the poles of mastery and despair; between Prospero and Timon; and, although it is customary to regard the great serious plays as special cases only, one can see the lines and forms of vital patterns in many of them. Romeo and Juliet seem to be youth, and their story the conflict of youth with the sins and errors of age and the established animosities and prejudices of society. Lear is more than an unfortunate old man. He seems also to be old age as known and experienced in the world. His faults are the faults of old age, to be sure; but he carries also in himself and his reactions to disaster a justification of growing old. To Romeo one would add Prince Hal, Bertram, Claudio, Hotspur, and a dozen others; and to Lear characters like John of Gaunt, Humphrey of Gloucester, and Wolsey, for from Shakespeare's unity of opinion one may derive a gallery of both youth and old age. The middle distance, with "dogged York," Bolingbroke, Brutus, Antony, Macbeth, Othello, and a score of others, is too full to be considered here.

One would not go too far in insisting on the general significance of Shakespeare's characters, but we may with safety proceed even farther than we have suggested; for Shakespeare seems to invite us to live. He would plainly have us participate in the battle of life. He blows a trumpet to summon us to enter the fray, which he seems to say is somehow good.